

Mikulová, Jana

[Pultrová, Lucie. The category of comparison in Latin]

*Graeco-Latina Brunensia*. 2023, vol. 28, iss. 2, pp. 170-172

ISSN 1803-7402 (print); ISSN 2336-4424 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/GLB2023-2-14>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.79125>

License: [CC BY-SA 4.0 International](#)

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20240108

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

**Pultrová, Lucie. (2023). *The Category of Comparison in Latin*. (340 pp.). Leiden – Boston: Brill. ISBN 978-90-04-52346-3.**

Jana Mikulová

The book *The Category of Comparison in Latin* by Lucie Pultrová tries to identify the characteristics responsible for the ability of adjectives and adverbs to form comparatives and/or superlatives. The author intended to provide theoretical analysis and a practical tool for Latin users, as follows from the research questions formulated in the introduction: “Which Latin adjectives allow for comparative and superlative forms, and which ones do not? Can any formal markers be identified that would help an ordinary Latin user determine whether the adjective is gradable?” (p. 3).

To answer these questions, she analysed a large number of instances. First, she excerpted all of the adjectives listed in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, which resulted in 10,000 entries. Then, she searched for synthetic and analytic comparatives and superlatives in the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina III (BTL-3)* database up to the 5th century CE. The author is transparent in describing the process of creating the corpus and commenting on problematic issues, such as the inclusion/exclusion of participles (pp. 33–34). During the analysis, she combines the synchronic and diachronic points of view and provides the etymology of individual words when relevant to the studied issue.

The book is divided into four chapters: 1) Theoretical Background and Methodology, 2) The Forms of Latin Comparison, 3) Gradable and Non-gradable Latin Adjectives, and 4) Conclusions.

The first chapter starts with an overview of approaches to the category of comparison in modern Latin grammar books and their criticism. Then Pultrová switches her attention to

observations on the topic made by Latin grammarians. I consider this part revealing since it shows that some modern opinions are rooted in Antiquity and have remained unchanged for centuries. The discussion of ancient opinions is followed by modern approaches to the typology of adjectives and their ability to form comparatives and superlatives. The author builds on the scalarity of adjectives, Kennedy and McNally’s typology of scales (pp. 24–27),<sup>1</sup> and the classification of Czech adjectives by Lehečková (pp. 30–31).<sup>2</sup>

At the very beginning of the introduction (p. 1), Pultrová mentions a terminological problem, namely the clash between the term *comparison* on the one hand and the terms *gradation* and *gradability* on the other. She returns to it on pages 10, 11, and 22, where she explains the difference between these terms in more detail. I consider the terms *gradation* and *gradability* more appropriate to the issues under examination. In contrast, the term *comparison* is broader and covers topics that are outside the scope of the book. I would only propose using these terms consistently in the first chapter, where they appear as synonyms.

The second chapter describes the forms of Latin comparatives and superlatives, including the etymology of suffixes, irregular forms, and so-called periphrastic gradation. The latter topic is particularly interesting because it is usually

1 Kennedy, C., & McNally, L. (2005). Scale structure, degree modification, and the semantics of gradable predicates. *Language*, 81(2), 345–381.

2 Lehečková, E. (2011). *Teličnost a skalárnost dead-jektivních sloves v češtině*. (Diss.). Univerzita Karlova, Praha.

regarded as marginal and not treated in depth. Pultrová fills this gap by providing data collected by searching the *BTL-3* database. In the context of the book, I consider it important to note the observation that some adjectives have both synthetic and analytical forms (p. 51) and that *magis* can have multiple different meanings that form a continuum (pp. 51–52). It follows that its meaning can be difficult to determine in individual cases. For example, I think that the instance *magis complures* (p. 135) could be interpreted as “rather many (of them)”, expressing contrast to *alii ipsorum* “the others of them” and referring to *pars maxima* “the majority” in the quote from Virgil “*pars maxima glandis liventis plumbi spargit*”:<sup>3</sup> *alii enim ipsorum et magis complures plumbeis massulis pugnabant iacientes has per diversa* (Claud. Don. 2, 7). The diachronic observation at the end of this section that there is no evidence of increased use of periphrastic forms (p. 62) corresponds to findings concerning some other linguistic phenomena that developed along the path from Latin to Romance languages. It thus adds another piece of evidence to the picture of grammatical developments found in Late Latin texts.

The third chapter forms the core of the book. The author thoroughly analyses the (non-)gradability of Latin adjectives and adverbs. She creates two main groups of adjectives: adjectives formed by composition (3.2) and adjectives formed by derivation (3.3). The former group is subdivided according to the syntactical structure of the compound (e.g. VP, NP). In addition, the author also builds on different typological classifications of adjectival compounds (3.3.2), which are used as a tool for interpreting the data. Adjectives formed by derivation are classified according to their base (verbal, substantival, adjectival, adverbial). Individual suffixes are commented on within these groups and

many examples are provided, including exceptions and dubious and ambiguous cases. These groups are supplemented by sections dealing with adverbs not derived from adjectives (3.4.6), adjectival and adverbial pronouns and numerals (3.4.7), and loan adjectives from Greek (3.4.8).

Some suffixes appear in compound adjectives and also adjectives formed by derivation. In such cases, the previous section where the suffix is mentioned is referred to. The result is an exhaustive description of the gradability of Latin adjectives and adverbs and a complex system of categories. Therefore, the reader will appreciate the summaries at the end of the larger sections.

The author is aware of the biases that could be caused by the low frequency of many adjectives. She also repeatedly reminds the reader that the absence of a comparative or superlative does not mean *per se* that the adjective is not gradable.

The last chapter offers conclusions. The author starts with the claim that “the results of the analysis, though based on a material corpus that is as large as possible, cannot themselves give a comprehensive answer” (p. 302). Then, she focuses on the (non-)gradability of the main groups of adjectives identified in the research. Given that she started with an analysis of Latin grammars and claimed that the aim of the book is practical, it might have been useful to add some paragraphs concerning an appropriate modification of explanations in Latin grammars and, possibly, also textbooks.

To sum up, the extensive material used for the research and its systematic, careful, and exhaustive analysis make Pultrová’s book a fundamental work for those interested in gradation and the history of the Latin language. Furthermore, it is a good point of departure for studying comparatives and superlatives from perspectives outside the book’s scope, such as pragmatics.

3 Verg. *Aen.* 7, 686–687.

**Mgr. Jana Mikulová, Ph.D.** / jana.mikulova@mail.muni.cz

Ústav klasických studií

Masarykova univerzita, Filozofická fakulta

Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic

---



This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>). This does not apply to works or elements (such as image or photographs) that are used in the work under a contractual license or exception or limitation to relevant rights.